

# THE OLYMPIC GAMES, A STIMULUS TO SPORT



ORGANIZING THE OLYMPIC GAMES CREATES OPPORTUNITIES FOR MODERNIZATION THAT GIVE ROOM FOR OPTIMISM AS REGARDS THE LONG-OVERDUE DEFINITIVE SOLUTION TO CERTAIN ASPECTS OF SPORT, SUCH AS THE INSTALLATIONS, THE ADAPTATION OF URBAN SITES, OR THE RESTRUCTURING OF SPORTS EDUCATION POLICIES.

MILAGROS GARCIA I BONAFÉ LECTURER IN THE THEORY OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SPORT

**T**o talk of Olympic spirit or the Olympic Games is, essentially, to talk of sport. Indeed, if we look closely at sport, we find it contains a host of social, economic and political implications which force us to be objective if we are to avoid slipping into a critical enthusiasm or, on the contrary, into "excessive" criticism.

Today, any reflection on this sporting phenomenon has to take into account the contradictory variables which make the Games one of the most passionately analysed events of our time.

From a Marxist standpoint, writers describe sport as a corporal activity which is increasingly hierarchical, centralized, codified and rationalized. It can be used as a means of domination and, in many cases, it is used to express class or group identity.

It is also true that sport forms part of certain processes by which free reign is given to excessively violent behaviour and the individual is driven by his ancestral aggression. Nevertheless, it is also true to say that sport can be looked at from a different point of view, as a means by

which the desire to play creates the opportunity to break free from an increasingly structured universe. In this sense sport can be seen as another aspect of democratic culture, and in this case, it attempts to reconcile the two opposing forces in our society: the freedom of the individual and the rationalization of society.

Sport also involves respect for rules and laws, and is a training for life and democracy.

It is from this point of view that I want to make a few reflections on the importance that organizing the Olympic Games can have for a community. To do so, I shall concentrate on Barcelona'92.

In spite of all the efforts, sport in Spain has still not managed to become integrated in the social fabric as a necessary reality. The moves to modernize culture and education in the country were interrupted by the Spanish Civil War (1936), and the work carried out by the *Institución Libre de Enseñanza* in physical education and sport disappeared along with the attempted educational reform. The forty years of dictatorship that followed, during

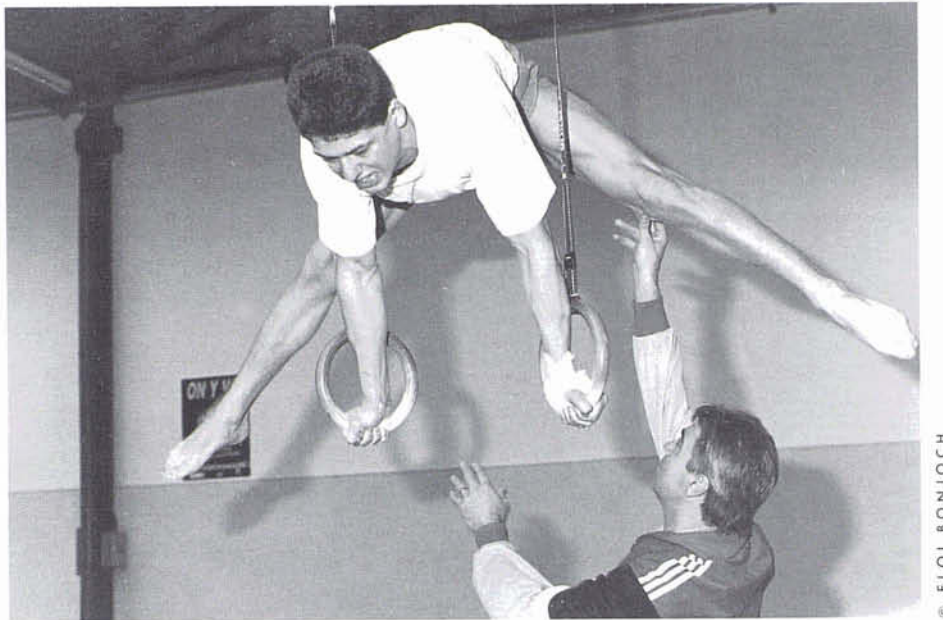
which sport developed along the lines set down in Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, shaped a militarist concept of sport, closely linked to a political process with no liberal or democratic qualities at all.

Until the restoration of democracy, sport had nowhere to express itself as a large scale event for the general public and become part of the daily life of the population. But ten years of democracy are not enough to put us on a level with other countries with a more liberal background. The problem our country is up against is the inherited lack of a suitable infrastructure and legal system which has made—and still makes—the adaptation difficult and expensive.

In this sense, organizing the Olympic Games creates opportunities for modernization that give room for optimism as regards the long overdue, definitive solution to the problem of sport.

Seen in this light, the Barcelona'92 Games could, and already do, provide an opportunity to improve the infrastructure. Hefty investments have been made to improve sports installations and to raise the standard of school facilities, although there is still a long way to go. Another intended





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project involves re-adapting urban sites for sporting events. The promotion which top level sport is beginning to receive will have to be tremendously increased over the next few years. The authorities are beginning to take an interest in the restructuring of school sports policy and matters which have been drawn attention to for years are beginning to be taken into consideration: the organization of physical activities in schools, the training of specialist teachers for primary schools, staff training in secondary schools, etc.

Government institutions are working on a structure through which sport can become integrated in school activities and enjoyed throughout the individual's life. However, there are contradictions which I feel should be looked at.

On the whole, the youth of Catalonia received the news of Barcelona's nomination for the 1992 Olympics with unbounded enthusiasm. This is borne out by the number of Olympic volunteers prepared to carry out the support work for the Games. Nevertheless, the attitude of those people responsible for sport does not seem to respond to the feelings of the

younger members of the community as expressed in public on that occasion.

Nothing has been made of the "Olympic experience" on a popular or informative level. An event like the Olympic Games should be more than just the organization of the Games, it should be more than just a chance to transform a city (though this is very important). The practice of sport, as a philosophy, a way of life, should be open to everybody if we really want sport to be more than just something to watch on television.

The Olympic games should be a chance for the public to get to know the "sporting reality" of their country, what steps are being taken, what is being planned and why.

If we take as our starting point the idea of sport as a lesson in democracy and as a cultural event on a level with the media or education, we should treat it as something equally democratic and accessible. Everybody should feel involved, because otherwise the Games are not likely to be more than a spectator event.

There is a danger involved in attaching too much importance to the outer image that is up for sale, at the expense of the

domestic aspects. We have to trust in the ambition and collaboration of the public. The challenge we face consists in making the Olympic Games a public event; the public must not, therefore, be forgotten.

Since the beginning of the history of the Olympic Games, they have gone through various phases: they have fallen prey to gigantism, to politics, have been ruled by economic and commercial factors, etc. The time has come for the Games to become democratic and popular, a festival where medals are not all that counts, nor victory all that is valued. Sport must find its roots in the more positive values of our society if it is not to become a cause of frustration and a means of exploitation. Everybody must contribute, any attempt to improve or transcend the sporting encounter, to make the Olympic Games a festive occasion, respected by all, is a task for the whole society. It is essential that everybody collaborate.

From a philosophical point of view, the organization of an event such as this should be all these things, and this is the challenge facing the country and the city designated; in this case, Barcelona'92. ●